

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## Kuchen Country

**German Delicacy  
Celebrates 25 Years as  
South Dakota's Official  
Dessert**

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**Swimming Safely**  
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# Annual Report to the Membership

Please join us for a celebration of 80 years of service. The Annual Membership Meeting will be held in Rapid City on Thursday, May 29th, 2025. In 2024, we proudly achieved a year of productivity, safety, and strong financial stability.

## RATES AND FINANCIALS

All 2024 financial goals were met and targets for the first quarter of 2025 are on budget. The \$5 per month increase to the customer charge that was implemented in May of 2024 was necessary and enabled your cooperative to keep up with the ever-increasing costs of equipment, material, wages and benefits, fuel, taxes, and insurance. Once again, strong margins in 2024 allowed your board to retire and return almost 2.4 million dollars to our members and allocate over 3.7 million dollars. Capital credit allocations are not cash. Your individual allocation is an investment in the cooperative. This investment is used for the lines, poles, substations, and maintenance required to provide electrical service to you and your neighbors. These dollars that you, our members, have supplied in your capital credit fund is called equity, and amounts to about 46% of the money needed to finance your co-op. The rest of the financing comes from our lenders. Your co-op ended 2024 in a sound financial position, and we are pleased to report that the independent auditing firm Ketel Thorstenson, LLP issued an unqualified audit opinion. The weather in 2024 was relatively mild. Overall kilowatt-hour sales increased by just .25%, and a warmer than average winter resulted in a decrease in electric heat sales of almost 7%.

Maintaining fiscal responsibility by controlling costs and striving for efficiency while balancing employee development and system improvements is a priority of your board of directors. Controllable costs continue to increase due to the resources allocated for our rights-of-way inspections, tree cutting, record keeping, maintenance, and having a competitive employee salary and benefits package. However, even with a competitive salary/benefits package, the total amount of employee salaries per member and the administrative and general expenses per member continue to be among the lowest of all the cooperatives in the state.

Basin Electric Power Cooperative, our wholesale power supplier, did have an increase on the heat rate in 2024 and increased its overall rates in January of 2025.

## OPERATIONS & ENGINEERING

Providing safe and reliable electric service is a primary purpose of your cooperative. Reliability and operational practices, safety, and meeting the needs of members and future growth continues to be the focus of the Operations and Engineering departments.

Wildfire mitigation is essential in your cooperative's operational practices. A significant part of providing safe and reliable service to our members is taking all practical actions available to prevent the devastation that wildfire could bring to the members and communities we serve. Your cooperative adopted a formal Wildfire Mitigation Plan in 2023 and continued the development of that plan in 2024. The main objective is the implementation of an actionable plan to increase reliability and safety while minimizing the likelihood that cooperative assets may be the origin or contributing factor in the ignition of a wildfire. The plan describes our strategies, programs, and procedures to mitigate the threat of electrical equipment ignited wildfires, addresses the unique features of our service territory, such as topography, weather, infrastructure, grid configuration, and areas most prone to wildfire risks. Your board of directors reviews and improves the plan yearly.

System inspections and maintenance programs are a top priority for your co-op. All 2,700 miles of our distribution and transmission rights-of-way are inspected annually. All inspections and maintenance records are documented. In addition to the yearly inspections of our system by cooperative personnel, an outside contractor is hired each year to inspect and treat a portion of the distribution and transmission poles for decay and rot. The contractor conducts various tests on the poles, including partial excavation, boring inspection holes, and sound techniques to help identify areas of decay above and below ground levels. The inspections are on a 10-year cycle, thus keeping the failure rate to a minimum. In 2024, the contractor inspected approximately 5,076 poles, which included 4,900 distribution poles and 176 transmission poles, at a cost of just over \$105,000.00.

Every four to five years, your cooperative develops a Construction Work Plan for needed upgrades to the system. The plan includes a quadrennial review of the system and load growth, recommending improvements consistent with long-range planning to ensure the system can reliably meet future peak demand and uphold the standards expected and needed by the membership. Rushmore Engineering prepares the work plan with recommendations to meet all required standards. Black Hills Electric adopted a new work plan in  
(continued on page 6)

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### BLACK HILLS ELECTRIC

(ISSN No. 1531-104X)

**Board President:** Jim Preston

**Board of Directors:**

Dave Lindblom - Vice President

Thad Wasson - Secretary

Alan Bishop - Asst. Secretary

Don Andersen - Treasurer

Gary Kluthe

Dennis Quivey

**CEO & General Manager:** Walker Witt

wwitt@bhec.coop

**Manager of Operations:** Bill Brisk

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**Chief Financial Officer:** Sammi Langendorf

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**System Coordinator:** Jesse Sorenson

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**IT Specialist:** Jeff Barnes

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**Director of Communications**

**& Member Services:** Michelle Fischer

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BLACK HILLS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is the monthly publication for the members of Black Hills Electric Cooperative, 25191 Cooperative Way, P.O. Box 792, Custer, S.D. 57730-0792. Black Hills Electric Cooperative Connections' purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to electric cooperative members on matters pertaining to their cooperative and living better with electricity. Also available at [www.bhec.coop](http://www.bhec.coop).

**This cooperative is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.** To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

**Subscription information:** Black Hills Electric Cooperative members devote 50 cents from their monthly electric payments for a subscription. Non-member subscriptions are available for \$12 annually. Periodicals Postage Paid at Black Hills Electric Cooperative, 25191 Cooperative Way, Custer, S.D. 57730-0792, and at additional mailing offices.

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# Official Notice of BHEC's 80th Annual Meeting

The 80th Annual Meeting of the Members of Black Hills Electric Cooperative, Inc. will be held at the Ramkota Convention Center II, 2111 North Lacrosse Street, City of Rapid City, County of Pennington, State of South Dakota.

Registration will open at 5 p.m. MDT, and the meal will be served at 6:00 p.m. MDT on Thursday, May 29th, 2025. The business meeting will start immediately after the meal on said day to take action on the following matters:

1. Action on the 2024 Annual Meeting Minutes
2. Reports from the Board and CEO/General Manager
3. Declaration of appointment of two directors according to the Bylaws

Pertaining to the declaration and election of directors, the following persons have been nominated by the Nominating Committee:

**For the geographical area** of Custer & Oglala Lakota Counties:

**Jim Preston**  
**14039 SD Hwy. 40**  
**Hermosa, SD 57744**

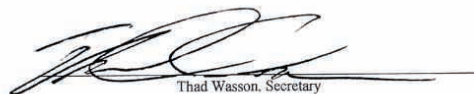
**Penny Svenkeson**  
**27201 Valley Rd.**  
**Hot Springs, SD 57747**

**For the geographical area** of Lawrence, Meade & Pennington Counties:

**Luis del Valle**  
**11061 Castle Creek Rd.**  
**Hill City, SD 57745**

**Dave Lindblom**  
**14170 Wrangler Rd.**  
**Rapid City, SD 57702**

Dated this 18th day of March, 2025:



Thad Wasson, Secretary



# Summer Safety

## Mosquitoes and Ticks

*Source: American Red Cross*

Don't let mosquitoes and ticks ruin your carefree summer fun. As we spend more time outdoors for activities like camping, hiking, swimming, picnicking and barbecuing, there is a greater chance of getting bitten by mosquitoes and ticks. According to the American Mosquito Control Association there are 176 known species of mosquito in the U.S. – putting Americans at risk from coast to coast. And while mosquitoes may be the most obvious detractor from summer fun – ticks are silent but dangerous. Most active during warmer months (April to September), it is especially important to be vigilant of blacklegged ticks, more commonly known as deer ticks, especially if you live in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, North-central or Northwest.

Mosquitoes and ticks are more than just itchy and annoying – if infected, these pests can pose a major health risk to people by possibly transmitting diseases. Follow these tips to prevent mosquito and tick bites this summer:

- Use insect repellents containing DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) when you are outdoors. Be sure to follow the directions on the package.
- Consider staying indoors at dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants and tuck your pant legs into your socks or boots.



*Photo by Jimmy Chan*

- Use a rubber band or tape to hold pants against socks so that nothing can get under clothing.
- Tuck your shirt into your pants. Wear light-colored clothing to make it easier to see tiny insects or ticks.
- When hiking in woods and fields, stay in the middle of trails. Avoid underbrush and tall grass.
- If you are outdoors for a long time, check yourself several times during the day. Especially check in hairy areas of the body like the back of the neck and the scalp line.
- Inspect yourself carefully for insects or ticks after being outdoors or have someone else do it.
- If you have pets that go outdoors, spray with repellent made for their breed/type. Apply the repellent according to the label and check your pet for ticks often.
- Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying sources of standing water outside of the home, such as from flowerpots, buckets and barrels.



**"Never Touch a Power Line!!"**

### Kashton Schecher, Age 7

Kashton cautions readers not to touch power lines. Thank you for your picture, Kashton! Kashton's parents are Brad and Brooke Schecher from Bison, S.D.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.

# SOUPS & SALADS

## GERMAN KRAUT SOUP

### Ingredients:

2 pork steaks  
Water  
1 diced onion  
3 stalks celery  
1 large carrot  
Butter  
6 diced potatoes  
1 qt. sauerkraut  
3 cups heavy cream  
Salt and pepper (to taste)

### Method

Gently simmer pork steaks in about three cups of water until done. (You can substitute other meat you have on hand – left over roasts or Polish sausage is nice). Dice meat. Sauté onion, celery and carrots in butter. In a Crock-Pot, add four cups of water, potatoes, sautéed veggies, diced meat and sauerkraut. Cook on low four to six hours until potatoes are tender. Add cream, salt and pepper. Transfer to a serving dish to share and enjoy!

**Kari Bevers**  
Codington-Clark Electric Member

## BLACK BEAN SALAD

### Ingredients:

3 tbsps. lemon juice  
1 clove garlic (minced)  
1/2 tsp. salt  
1/4 tsp. pepper  
3/4 tsp. ground cumin  
2 tbsps. olive oil  
(2)15 oz. cans black beans (drained and rinsed)  
1 pt. cherry tomatoes (halved)  
4 scallions or green onions  
1 yellow or green bell pepper (cut into thin strips)  
3 tbsps. fresh cilantro or parsley (chopped)

### Method

In a small bowl, stir together lemon juice, garlic, salt, pepper and cumin until salt is dissolved. Slowly whisk in oil until dressing mixture thickens. In a large bowl combine beans, tomatoes, scallions or onions, peppers and cilantro or parsley. Toss with dressing to coat. Let stand at least 15 minutes before serving. \*Makes 6 servings.

**Reta Eidem**  
Clay-Union Electric Member

## LASAGNA SOUP

### Ingredients:

1 lb. lean ground beef  
1 cup chopped onion  
1 can (28 oz.) petite diced tomatoes, undrained  
1 can (15 oz.) tomato sauce  
2 tbsp. garlic, herb and black pepper and sea salt all purpose seasoning  
1 container (32 oz.) chicken stock, (4 cups)  
8 oz. (about 10) lasagna noodles, broken into small pieces

### Method

Brown ground beef in large saucepan on medium heat. Drain fat. Add onion; cook and stir 2 to 3 minutes or until softened.

Stir in tomatoes, tomato sauce, Seasoning and stock. Bring to boil. Add lasagna noodle pieces; cook 6 to 7 minutes or until noodles are tender.

Ladle soup into serving bowls. Serve with dollops of ricotta cheese and sprinkle with shredded mozzarella cheese, if desired.

**McCormick.com**

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2025. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.



# REPORT TO THE MEMBERSHIP

(continued from page 2)

April of 2024, and in December secured a \$14 million dollar loan for the purpose of implementing the plan.

The cooperative's actions and efforts to improve reliability are working. In 2024, the average Black Hills Electric Cooperative service was on 99.9995% of the time.

## MEMBER SERVICES

As we reflect on 2024, the Member Service Department is proud of the progress we've made in engaging and supporting our members. We achieved notable success by increasing participation in our Demand Response Program, growing the number of active Demand Response Units (DRUs) from 550 to approximately 625. This expansion has contributed to reducing peak demand costs, directly benefiting the cooperative and its members.

A major milestone was the complete redesign of our website, which now offers improved accessibility, functionality, and a more user-friendly experience. This upgrade ensures that members can easily access essential information, tools, and resources.

Our commitment to community engagement remained strong, as our team maintained a visible presence at numerous community events, including Area Meetings, the BH Stock Show, the BH Home Builders Home Show, local fairs, Co-op Day, and many more. These interactions continue to strengthen our connections with the membership. Looking ahead to 2025, we aim to expand awareness of energy management strategies, empowering members to make informed decisions about optimizing their energy usage and reducing costs. Additionally, we are proud to introduce a new bottled water donation program designed to support schools and organizations across our service territory.

At Black Hills Electric Cooperative, we remain steadfast in our commitment to serving our members with excellence and look forward to another year of building lasting connections within our community.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

In 2024, we successfully enabled daily kilowatt (kW) display on SmartHub graphs for members on demand rates. We have spent a lot of the year working with our metering vendor to fine-tune our new system so we can work to implement processes that will give us closer to real-time outage notifications. We also developed ways to use meter blink data and voltage data we get from our new metering system to better understand how our distribution system is performing, allowing us to be more proactive on possible issues that can cause outages for our members.

Cybersecurity remains a top priority for our co-op. We partnered with Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative (REPC), our Generation & Transmission co-op, to secure cost savings on EDR (Endpoint Detection & Response) software. This collaboration not only reduced costs through increased buying power, but also provided additional monitoring support. We transitioned from our in-house email server to Microsoft O365, reducing vulnerabilities common to in-house systems. Working with REPC, we engaged with a cybersecurity consulting company to get a security review of our new O365 and followed up with all areas that needed attention. We also implemented multifactor authentication (MFA) for all computers and servers, complementing our existing virtual private network (VPN) authentication measures.

## SAFETY

Safety is at the forefront of everything we do. Safety of the public, our members, and our employees is always the most important priority of your cooperative. Your employees have a safety committee that meets monthly to discuss all areas of safety and sets the agenda for employee safety meetings. We are happy and proud to report that in 2024 we had no loss time injuries, and in fact, for the first time since we began keeping track of injuries, we did not have ONE reported injury!

## CLOSING

Your board president and CEO appreciate the dedication of the board of directors and employees for their efforts in meeting the cooperative's mission. We also thank each of our members; it is an honor to serve you. We hope to see you at the annual meeting.



WALKER WITT - CEO



JIM PRESTON - PRESIDENT



The 79th Annual Membership Meeting of Black Hills Electric Cooperative, Inc. was held at the Ramkota Convention Center II in Rapid City, South Dakota, on May 30th, 2024. Registration opened at 5:00 p.m., and the evening meal was served at 6:00 p.m. All directors were present (Don Andersen, Alan Bishop, Gary Kluthe, Dave Lindblom, Jim Preston, Dennis Quivey, and Thad Wasson). President Dennis Quivey called the meeting to order at 6:44 p.m. and welcomed members and guests. The membership stood to honor America by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

President Quivey called on Board Secretary Don Andersen to address the membership and read the Summary of Annual Meeting Notices. Mr. Andersen announced there was a quorum with 165 members registered for the 2024 Annual Meeting out of a total membership of 8,856.

President Quivey requested a motion to approve the 2023 Annual Membership Meeting Minutes which were mailed to each member on May 6th from Aberdeen, South Dakota. A motion was made, seconded, and passed to approve the printed 2023 Annual Membership Meeting Minutes.

President Quivey introduced the other board of directors of the cooperative which consisted of Treasurer Gary Kluthe, Secretary Don Andersen, Asst. Secretary Thad Wasson, Alan Bishop, and Dave Lindblom. He also introduced General Counsel Tracy Kelley, CEO & General Manager Walker Witt, and Vice President Jim Preston. President Quivey then recognized several special guests who were in attendance. President Quivey addressed the membership, accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. He reported that Black Hills Electric ended the 2023 year without any rate adjustments, significant storms, or injured employees. Mr. Quivey informed the membership that the 2023 audit was satisfactory, and the auditors gave an unqualified opinion. He stated that the co-op is in a sound financial position and informed the members of the shortened capital credit return timeframe. He advised that all financial targets, loan obligations, and covenants were met or exceeded. Mr. Quivey informed the membership that the board approved a four-year work plan budget for around 14 million dollars. President Quivey discussed costs and reported that the controllable costs continue to be low. He reported that the average BHEC member had power 99.9995% of the time in 2023. Mr. Quivey concluded his report by thanking the employees, directors, and members for their commitment and dedication to the cooperative.

President Quivey introduced CEO and General Manager Walker Witt to give his report to the membership.

Mr. Witt discussed reliability issues in 2024 due to equipment failure and a winter storm. He informed the membership of a rate increase effective May 1st, 2024, and the impacts of inflation. He stated that wholesale power costs may impact additional rate adjustments in the future. He discussed federal regulation and how it may affect rates and reliability. Mr. Witt informed the membership that the Environmental Protection Agency released four new rules and the impacts of those rules. He stated that National Rural Electric Cooperative is working hard to overturn the rules, and BHEC fully supports those actions.

CEO Witt informed the membership of the 2023 write-off amount and thanked the members, innovative technology advances, and the Member Service department for their efforts in keeping the write-off balance low. He also updated the membership on the completed meter conversion. Mr. Witt stated that the 2023 inventory adjustment was \$3.97 and thanked the employees for their due diligence in maintaining their checks and balances.

Mr. Witt concluded his report by thanking the directors, employees, and the membership for their continued support and participation.

General Counsel Tracy Kelley explained the director elections. Ms. Kelley explained that the board of directors had appointed the nominating committee to nominate candidates for the ballot. Ms. Kelley informed the membership that two director positions were up for election. Ms. Kelley reported that postcards were sent to all eligible members in the geographical areas with director positions up for election. One representing Lawrence, Meade, and Pennington Counties, and one representing Fall River County. Ms. Kelley explained the appointment of the Nominating Committee and introduced Committee Chairman Robert Hovey. Mr. Hovey explained that the Nominating Committee met on March 1st to consider nominees for the directorships for both geographical areas. He stated that the committee nominated incumbent director Gary Kluthe and candidate Luis del Valle for the position representing the geographical areas of Lawrence, Meade, and Pennington Counties, and Don Andersen for the director position representing the Fall River geographical area.

Mr. Hovey thanked the members of the Nominating Committee for their participation, which included Delia Johnson, Brea Seger, Ray Summers, Stephenie Rittberger, and Lindsay Luper.

Ms. Kelley introduced the nominees and then called on each candidate to address the membership. Ms. Kelley informed the membership that nominee Luis del Valle was not able to attend the meeting and would not be addressing the membership. Gary Kluthe and Don Andersen addressed the membership. Ms. Kelley called for the casting of ballots and asked the Credentials and Elections Committee to collect the ballots. Ms. Kelley called on President Dennis Quivey to make the declaration of the director representing Fall River County.

President Dennis Quivey, pursuant to Article IV, Section 2 of the Bylaws, declared Don Andersen elected to the director position representing the geographical area of Fall River County.

Mr. Quivey introduced the 2023 Washington D.C. Youth Tour winner, Karina Novotny. Ms. Novotny provided the membership with a presentation on her Youth Tour experience and thanked the membership for the opportunity.

General Counsel Tracy Kelley announced the election results. Incumbent Gary Kluthe was the director elected to represent the geographical areas of Lawrence, Meade, and Pennington Counties.

President Quivey inquired as to whether there was any old business, and there being none, inquired as to whether there was any new business. There being no additional new business, the president advised that he would entertain a motion for adjournment. This motion was made, seconded, and passed by a voice vote at 7:43 p.m.

Mr. Quivey introduced Michelle Fischer, Director of Communications and Member Services. She presented the \$1,000 Basin/BHEC scholarship to Lilibeth Schaack from Rapid City. Ms. Schaack drew for two additional \$500 scholarships. The winners were Rachel Miklos and Allison Hill. Ms. Fischer informed the membership that Regan Sorenson was the 2024 SDREA Washington D.C. Youth Tour winner. Ms. Fischer touched on the 2024 Bus Tour that is planned for September 10th. Ms. Fischer encouraged members to support the Political Action Committee (PAC), formally known as ACRE.

Cooperative personnel awarded several prizes after the meeting.





Pietz's Kuchen Kitchen & Specialties employees Amanda Garcia and Myra Bachman with owners Lori and Roger Pietz.  
Photo by Jacob Boyko

# SOUTH DAKOTA IS KUCHEN COUNTRY

## German Delicacy Celebrates 25 Years as State's Official Dessert

**Jacob Boyko**

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

On a brisk spring morning, balls of dough rise hours before the sun. One at a time, they're placed onto a press and flattened before being positioned into tins. Carefully, Lori Pietz ladles custard overtop, sprinkles in fruit, and passes off a tray of the desserts to her husband, Roger, for baking. As Roger pulls open the door of the stainless steel commercial oven, a wave of heat emanates across the kitchen. He slides the tray of five desserts onto a shelf in the oven, then removes another tray and sets it aside to cool before they begin packaging.

Roger and Lori will repeat this process at least 100 more times this morning to keep up with their customers' orders.

In the town of Scotland, northwest of Yankton, Pietz's Kuchen Kitchen & Specialties is one business that has turned South Dakotans' love for kuchen – a

delectable unification of cake, custard and pie – into a thriving business.

Kuchen, the German word for cake, has been a staple at European kitchen tables for centuries. The delicacy has stood the test of time, continuing to serve as a tea-time – or any-time – favorite across cultures and continents, especially right here in South Dakota.

"I think it's because of the population, because the greatest proportion of immigrants (in South Dakota) are the Germans from Russia," co-owner Lori Pietz said of kuchen's popularity. "There are German areas, there are Czech areas, there are Norwegian areas — but there are a lot of Germans from Russia."

Roger comes from one of those German-Russian families where the tradition of baking homemade kuchen has been passed down for generations.

"I watched my mother make kuchen as a little kid," Roger remembered. "I'd stand a little ways from the oven and I'd watch

her make it and I loved it."

Staying true to his German-Russian roots, Roger's love for kuchen never faded. After marrying Lori, Roger remembers telling her that if he could ever recreate his mother's kuchen recipe, he could probably market it and sell it.

Owning a kuchen shop was always a retirement dream, the couple recalled. But after going through several farm accidents, the Pietzs' decided to pivot in 2008. Trading plows for whisks, Pietz's Kuchen became a reality.

The operation quickly outgrew their make-shift basement kitchen, so Roger and Lori opened up a storefront and commercial kitchen in the nearby town of Scotland in 2011.

Today, the store ships an estimated 2,500 kuchen monthly to grocery stores, butcher shops, and restaurants across South Dakota and the Midwest.

Roger and Lori's kuchen offerings range from Americanized options – blueberry, peach, strawberry – to the more traditional blends of 18th and 19th century Europe, including rhubarb,



prune and cottage cheese.

Lori explained that historically kuchen was made using ingredients that were readily available, making it the ideal comfort-food and cultural dish for immigrants building their lives on South Dakota farms.

“There are a lot of Germans from Russia who brought rhubarb over with them, so they made a lot of rhubarb kuchen,” Lori said. “Flour and sugar were available, and they all had chickens and cows, so that’s kind of how it kept going.”

Lori didn’t grow up eating much kuchen. Her mother, who was of Czech descent, favored fluffy pastries called kolaches – filled with jam, poppy seeds or cream cheese.

But once Lori joined the Pietz family, she saw an opportunity to bridge both traditions. Drawing on the popularity of poppy seed kolaches in the Czech community, she created a Czech-inspired twist: poppy seed kuchen.

“There’s a lot of Czech people out there that like poppy seed kolaches,” Roger said. “And when they hear there’s poppy seed kuchen, they’re buying it.”

Kuchen’s footprint in South Dakota extends far beyond Scotland. Annual events like the Kuchen Festival in Delmont and Schmeckfest in Freeman invite locals and visitors alike to sample a variety of recipes and baking styles.

In McPherson County, the town of Eureka also has a reputation for being a kuchen-tasting hot spot, with several local kitchens offering their own takes on the dish.

South Dakotans’ love for kuchen runs so deep that it’s been codified into law; In 2000, State Sen. James Lawler, whose district included Eureka, helped lead the charge in Pierre to designate kuchen as the official state dessert.

Lawler, who once served as a judge for a local kuchen contest in Eureka, said the bill was part of a broader push to support local industries and breathe new life into small towns.

“The town of Eureka really got behind me and supported that bill,” Lawler recalled. “Those women up there got together and made enough kuchen for the whole legislature, and we fed them all and got the bill passed.”

A framed commemorative print of that bill hangs on the wall by the checkout counter in Roger and Lori’s shop – a tribute to all of the kuchen fans who have made their business what it is today.

“If you asked me 15 years ago what our business was going to be...I’d have said we’d sell a few,” Roger laughed. “I thought if it flopped, my friends would buy some from me and they wouldn’t let me down. Never did I anticipate this. Never. It’s just unbelievable.”

## The Germans From Russia

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Russian leaders made an appeal to German families to emigrate to Russia, promising land, religious freedom and military service exemptions.

According to the Prairie Public Broadcasting documentary, *The Germans From Russia: Children of the Steppe, Children of the Prairie*, the first wave of German immigrants arrived in 1764 during the reign of Catherine the Great. For Catherine, this was strategic; adding population to the sparser areas of her empire not only developed Russia’s agricultural economy, but also helped create a buffer against invaders from central Asia.

The settlements dotted the Volga River in Russia and the Black Sea in modern Ukraine and Crimea. The German villages closely resembled the communities they left behind as well as the ones they’d later build on the American prairie, with distinct churches and earth-brick houses.

While the Germans held onto their language, culture, and customs, Slavic influence gives the Germans from Russia a distinct identity. One notable difference is in their kuchen. While the traditional German dish resembles a yeast-based fruit cake, the eastern version is typically richer and made with custard.

Later in the 19th century, the special privileges German settlers had been granted were slowly being eroded. The Germans’ special status was lowered to that of common peasants, they could now be drafted into the Russian army, and were forced to assimilate to the Russian language and education system.

Many German settlers left their villages in Russia to start over once again in North America and South America, while those remaining in Russia would go on to suffer through civil and world wars and the man-made Holodomor famine during the 20th century.

The Germans who had settled the banks of the Volga River went on to populate large swaths of Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado, while the Germans from the Black Sea region primarily settled the Dakota Territory and Canada – bringing kuchen with them.



Fruit is sprinkled over the dough, followed by a ladle of custard. Lori Pietz uses a scale to ensure nutrition labeling is precise.

Photo by Jacob Boyko

## Meet your Candidates

### Custer and Oglala Lakota Counties



**Jim Preston** has served on the board since 2008. He holds an MBA from the University of South Dakota and a Master's in Public Administration from Webster University. His career includes roles as Finance Officer for the City of Rapid City,

Business Manager for Custer School District, and Business Manager for Custer State Park.

A retired U.S. Army Colonel, Preston commanded the 196th Regiment at Ft. Meade, SD, and attended the Air War College. He has led multiple organizations, including the SD Governmental Human Resource Association and the SD Finance Officers Association.

Preston and his wife, Dee, have been married for nearly 49 years and have three children and eight grandchildren.

**Penny Svenkeson** has been a BHEC member since 1993. Penny is a graduate from the University of Minnesota, where she holds a degree in Computer Science, and a minor in Electrical Engineering. A veteran of the computer and technology industry, Penny worked at Unisys for 42 years, serving in the role of lead platform architect prior to retiring. Unisys is a leading global technology solutions company, and Penny designed large scale enterprise computer servers used by domestic



and international corporations and governments. Her team was located around the world, and Penny served as the technical interface to oversee design and collaboration. A trusted expert, Penny was the technical liaison with supporting partner companies.

Penny and her husband Paul, have owned and operated a ranch west of Hot Springs for 32 years. They raise

Scottish Highland and Red Angus cattle.

Penny retired in 2021 and enjoys volunteering in the community. She is the secretary/treasurer of the Minnekahta Fire Protection District. She also enjoys donating her time to deliver food as part of the Meal on Wheels program, and provide information technology (IT) and computer technical support at the Hot Springs Public Library.

"I recognize the critical role the cooperative plays in supporting its members and ensuring access to affordable power. I believe I can contribute unique experiences and perspectives to support the continued success of the Black Hills Electric Cooperative."

May 29th, 2025  
Black Hills Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
80th Annual Meeting

## BALLOT

Board of Directors: Three-year term

**Geographical area of Custer and Oglala Lakota Counties:**

VOTE FOR ONE

☐ **Jim Preston**

☐ **Penny Svenkeson**





# Meet your Candidates

## Lawrence, Meade and Pennington Counties



**Luis del Valle** has been a BHEC member since June 2022. He has a Master of Business Administration in Corporate Finance and Investment Management from Cornell University and a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering through Virginia Military

Institute. He served in the active and reserve military for 31 years. He was the Platoon Commander, second-in-command, leading a 51-man platoon during the Gulf War for the Marine Corps. During his reserve service, he served as a Civil Affairs Officer, Operations Officer, Civil-Military Operations Officer, and Commanding Officer. He has extensive energy sector experience including electrical distribution, wind energy, distributed generation, and renewable energy. He currently works for the US Patent and Trademark Office as a Patent Examiner and serves on the finance committee at Immaculate Conception Church in Rapid City.

He and his wife, along with their six children, found their forever home near Hill City. Mr. del Valle is semi-retired now and is looking to bring his military, energy, and business experience to the board.

"I strive to give before I ask and go the extra mile even though not required."

**Dave Lindblom** is currently vice president of the BHEC board and has completed his fifth term as a director. He also serves on the Rushmore Electric board. A lifelong rancher, Lindblom and his wife, Starla, along with their son, Brad, run cattle near Hermosa, continuing their family's deep ties to Hart Ranch since 1961. With decades of ranching



experience, he values sustainability and responsible land stewardship in both agriculture and energy. In addition to his involvement in the agricultural community, where he has served on the Central States Fair and Black Hills Stock Show boards, Lindblom has dedicated 34 years to the Battle Creek

Fire Department, where he currently serves as Assistant Chief. He has also spent nine years on the Pennington County Fire Service Board, now serving as chairperson, and is a member of the Custer County Fire Advisory Board.

He remains committed to preserving rural electrification and keeping electricity affordable for future generations.

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**Geographical area of Lawrence, Meade and Pennington Counties:**

VOTE FOR ONE

☐ **Luis del Valle**  
☐ **Dave Lindblom**

# SWIMMING SAFELY

## Tips to Ensure Your Family Swims Safe This Summer

**Jacob Boyko**

[jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop](mailto:jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop)

The leading cause of death for American children under the age of five: drowning.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 4,000 fatal drownings occur each year in the U.S., with the number of deaths sharply increasing in May and reaching a peak in July.

And according to Consumer Affairs, that number has been on the rise since 2020, especially among young children.

Whether at a waterpark, lake, backyard pool, or even a hot tub, being safety-aware and educating others can prevent drownings and other pool accidents and save lives.

According to Holly Hardy, aquatics director for the Oahe Family YMCA in Pierre, safety begins with supervision.

“Somebody should always be observing the water when there are kids in a pool,”

Hardy said. “It doesn’t matter if it’s our (YMCA) pool, a backyard pool, or the river. There needs to be a person there that’s responsible for watching the kids.”

At the YMCA’s pool, lifeguards who aren’t sure about a child’s swimming skills can have them do a swim test, where the child has to either show they can swim the length of the pool or remain in the shallow end.

“At our (YMCA) pool, we have those big slides and kids want to go down them because their buddies are going down them, and they want to go down but they can’t swim,” Hardy explained. “That’s where we pull the most people out of the water – the slide or the diving board.”

The YMCA lifeguards also have a rule against seeing how long you can hold your breath – children can hyperventilate before submerging and faint, which is called a

hypoxic blackout. Hardy also stresses the importance of swimming lessons, since understanding basics like how to float, swim, exit water and feeling oriented and calm are critical for water safety. She recommends to begin swimming lessons as soon as possible – The YMCA offers swimming lessons for children as young as six months old.

But swimming lessons are not a substitute for properly securing a pool.

According to Consumer Affairs, 87% of fatal drownings for the 0-5 age range occur in backyard pools.

That’s why a sturdy fence and self-latching gate around the pool area are still essential for preventing accidents. Even temporary mesh fence options can work in some instances.

Additionally, submersion alarms and door alarms can audibly alert you when someone enters the pool or pool area.

By communicating the pool safety rules to children and guests, as well as taking preventive measures to prevent accidents in the first place, you may be saving lives.



# Pool Safety Checklist

## Is there supervision?

- All children should be under responsible adult supervision.
- Designate “water watchers” and minimize distractions.
- Keep a phone close by for calling 911.
- Always swim with a buddy – Never alone.
- Keep throwing equipment or reaching equipment nearby.
- Consider CPR training – it could save a life.

## Can everybody in the pool swim?

- Ensure everyone in the pool can at least swim from one end of the pool and back.
- Weak or new swimmers should keep to shallow water and use flotation aids.
- Parents should stay close – preferably within arm’s reach – to weak or new swimmers.
- Sign up for swimming lessons – it’s a lifesaving skill.

## Are there safety barriers?

- Install and maintain a proper fence and self-latching gate around the pool.
- Consider a door alarm and pool alarm for an audible alert when someone enters the pool or pool area.
- Hot tubs should have properly-latched covers.

## Recognize hazards.

- Stay away from drains and water intake pipes, as body parts, hair, jewelry, and loose clothing can get pulled in. Drains should have anti-entanglement drain covers, and pumps should have accessible shut-offs.
- Ensure tiles, handrails, anti-slip pads, and ladders are properly installed and maintained.

- Electrical work should be done by a qualified electrician. Chargers, extension cords and other electronics should be kept away from the pool area.
- Check your pool water regularly to avoid illness from contaminants and chemical burns.
- Avoid slips and falls by picking up pool toys and other hazards. Do not run or roughhouse near the pool.
- If you’re not sober, don’t swim.
- Diving can result in serious injury. Make sure others know when a pool is not safe for diving.
- Store pool chemicals and additives somewhere inaccessible to children.
- Ensure proper lighting is installed around the pool area and never swim in the dark.
- Consider an animal escape ramp for pets and wild animals.

## Remind your children and guests...

Establish pool-safe rules for your children and any guests at your home. Remind your children to...

- Never swim without permission and supervision. Other children are not supervisors.
- Don’t enter a pool area or go near water alone.
- Never roughhouse or run in the pool area.
- Never dive in shallow water.
- Stay away from chemicals and additives.
- Keep the pool area tidy and hazard-free.
- Keep electrical devices and cords away from the pool area.
- Never hyperventilate or try and see how long you can hold your breath underwater. Hyperventilating can induce fainting, called hypoxic blackouts and lead to drowning.

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS



DAVE LINDBLOM  
VICE PRESIDENT



JIM PRESTON  
PRESIDENT



THAD WASSON  
SECRETARY



ALAN BISHOP  
ASST. SECRETARY



DON ANDERSEN  
TREASURER



GARY KLUTHE



DENNIS QUIVEY

## YOUR CO-OP: BY THE NUMBERS

CO-OP STATISTICS	2023	2024
Total Miles of Line	2,743	2,754
Overhead	2,319	2,318
Underground	336	348
Transmission	88	88
Active Services per Mile of Line	4.09	4.14
Number of Active Services	11,212	11,396
Total Number of Employees	27	27
Controllable Cost	\$5,144,997	<b>\$5,693,715</b>

KWH ENERGY SALES	2023	2024
Residential	109,662,750	109,992,218
Seasonal	13,862,284	13,892,317
Irrigation	1,363,223	2,179,721
Small Commercial	23,023,070	23,342,064
Large Commercial & Industrial	11,298,801	10,181,896
Public & Resale	1,459,205	1,486,313
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>160,669,333</b>	<b>161,074,529</b>



# FINANCIALS

CURRENT ASSETS - WHAT WE OWN		2023	2024
Electric Plant		\$93,496,212	\$95,296,774
Accumulated Depreciation		(\$37,870,681)	(\$39,891,547)
Other Property & Investments		\$10,738,743	\$11,091,083
Cash & Cash Equivalents		\$9,391,963	\$7,559,893
Accounts Receivable		\$2,871,187	\$3,147,541
Material & Supplies		\$3,320,814	\$4,947,080
Other Current & Accrued Assets		\$156,479	\$168,510
Deferred Debits		\$49,669	\$76,955
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>		<b>\$82,154,386</b>	<b>\$82,396,289</b>
CURRENT LIABILITIES - WHAT WE OWE		2023	2024
Long-Term Debt		\$37,318,391	\$35,160,671
Accounts Payable		\$1,371,149	\$1,363,973
Accrued Taxes		\$495,135	\$475,263
Other Current Liabilities		\$756,407	\$1,004,601
Member Deposits, Prepayments & Advances for Construction		\$2,354,595	\$2,572,361
Unclaimed Capital Credits		\$934,326	\$1,038,756
Deferred Credit		\$2,700,000	\$2,700,000
Our Equities - Patronage Capital		\$36,224,383	\$38,080,664
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>		<b>\$82,154,386</b>	<b>\$82,396,289</b>
REVENUES - WHAT WE TOOK IN		2023	2024
Residential		\$15,264,814	\$15,784,994
Seasonal		\$2,527,255	\$2,672,550
Irrigation		\$256,334	\$352,163
Small Commercial		\$3,059,454	\$3,152,011
Large Commercial & Industrial		\$1,623,597	\$1,506,425
Public & Resale		\$231,977	\$240,490
Other		\$568,308	\$766,991
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>		<b>\$23,531,739</b>	<b>\$24,475,624</b>
EXPENSES - WHAT WE SPENT		2023	2024
Power & Transmission		\$11,580,942	\$11,352,208
Maintenance & Operation		\$2,650,454	\$3,093,676
Member Accounts, Services & Information		\$1,010,921	\$1,100,790
General & Administrative		\$1,483,621	\$1,499,249
Depreciation		\$3,036,588	\$3,092,037
Interest		\$1,082,559	\$1,153,758
Taxes & Other Deductions		\$231,025	\$282,863
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>		<b>\$21,076,110</b>	<b>\$21,574,581</b>
MARGINS - WHAT WE HAVE LEFT		2023	2024
Operating Margins		\$2,455,629	\$2,901,043
Non-Operating Margins		\$303,553	\$424,802
Capital Credits		\$1,069,305	\$881,045
<b>TOTAL MARGINS</b>		<b>\$3,828,487</b>	<b>\$4,206,890</b>



To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

**JUNE 3**  
**Deadwood Trolley on the Trail**  
Deadwood, SD

**JUNE 5**  
**Lions Club/Vitalant Blood Drive**  
Hill City Center  
Hill City, SD

**JUNE 7**  
**Spring Volksmarch**  
Crazy Horse Memorial

**JUNE 14**  
**Mt. Rushmore Rodeo at Palmer Gulch**  
Palmer Gulch Resort  
6 p.m.  
Hill City, SD

**JUNE 14**  
**Hill City Library Book Sale**  
Hill City Library  
Hill City, SD

**JUNE 14**  
**The Big Mick**  
George S. Mickelson Trail

**JUNE 15**  
**1880 Train Old West Shootout**  
5 p.m.  
Hill City, SD

**JUNE 19**  
**Juneteenth National Independence Day – National Park Fee-Free Day**

**JUNE 21**  
**Mt. Rushmore Rodeo at Palmer Gulch**  
Palmer Gulch Resort  
6 p.m.  
Hill City, SD

**JUNE 21-22**  
**Run Devils Tower**

**JUNE 20-22**  
**Mickelson Trail Summer Trek**

**JUNE 29**  
**1880 Train Old West Shootout**  
5 p.m.  
Hill City, SD

### ATTENTION BUSINESSES, CHURCHES, SCHOOL DISTRICTS, AND OTHER MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS:

Member Organizations of Black Hills Electric Cooperative, Inc., such as school districts, towns, churches, corporations, and LLCs wishing to vote at the Annual Meeting must complete this form and present it at the registration desks on **May 29th, 2025**.

All of these organizational members are entitled to representation and a vote.

Each entity should designate a representative who is an officer, owner, or member of the organization.

#### Authorization to Vote

This is to certify that \_\_\_\_\_ is hereby designated the delegate to the Black Hills

(Name of Person)  
Electric Cooperative, Inc., Annual Meeting on May 29th, 2025,

from \_\_\_\_\_ whose account number is \_\_\_\_\_.

(Name of Entity)

Named delegate is authorized to vote on all issues that may come before the meeting including election of directors.

By: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

**Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.**